

Versatile Aspiration -

On the 100th Birthday of Josef Friedrich Doppelbauer

Guest article by Matthias Wamser, organ player in Basel

My music stand at this moment bears a two-minute, lucidly structured, buoyant piece for four-part mixed choir explicitly called by its composer a ‘little motet’: ‘Cantate Domino canticum novum’ (1968) by Josef Friedrich Doppelbauer. The repetition and superimposition of short, profiled motives defined by the word rhythm provides energy and ‘drive’ in the corresponding framing sections, the tonal centre is not questioned, but neither is it enforced by conventional cadences.



The New Song

The invitation ‘O sing unto the LORD a new song’ from psalms 33, 96 and 98 is one of the best-known psalm verses but formulates an aspiration that today’s concepts of church music not always manage to meet. In light of extremely diverse developments we have to ask the question what the ‘new song’ can be today. Can a 50-year-old composition with audible connections to tradition still be counted a ‘new song’ today?



Doppelbauer at the age of 16



Maria, Josef Friedrich, Karl, Rupert und Josef

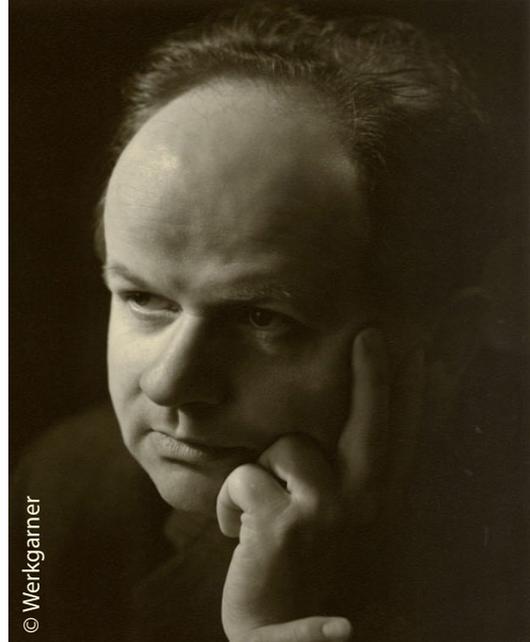
Caught between two stools

Many composers born in the first quarter of the 20th century tried to be accessible to a heterogeneous audience—building upon the innovations of early modernism and without any fear to hand over their creations to ecclesiastic or pedagogic ‘use.’ From the 1960s at the latest some original and productive composers of that generation felt segregated from the sphere of responsibility of a music acknowledged as ‘new’; this happened in face of the adamant claims and charges of the musical avantgarde. But then again, their pieces were still rejected as ‘too modern’ by conservative audiences. From this ambivalent perception resulted a strange ‘place between the chairs,’ with many a composer—such as the Berlin composer Ernst Pepping (1901 – 81)—fell prematurely silent. Today, music of the 20th and 21st centuries is treated more liberally; however, the fatal tendency of the ‘canonization’ of a standard repertoire marketed as ‘classical’ necessitates more and more strongly to appeal to the openness of the listeners and to create new accessibility. Fresh and unconventional pieces like Doppelbauer’s motet we mentioned above should and must continue to have their refreshing effect as a ‘new song.’



Wels - Graz - Salzburg

Josef Friedrich Doppelbauer was born in 1918 in Upper Austrian Wels. It was here that composer Johann Nepomuk David (1895 – 1977) was active from 1923 to 1934 as primary school teacher, organist of the Lutheran Christuskirche and as conductor of the Bach Choir founded by him. After the matura,



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Matthias Wamser

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Doppelbauer continued his studies at Graz until 1940: he studied composition, organ and cello at the conservatory and attended lectures in German studies and art history at the university; at the newly founded Hochschule für Musikerziehung (University for Music Education) he enrolled in the major subjects of music pedagogy and organ in 1939. He graduated in composition (1939) and organ (1940) with distinction. After war service and captivity in Yugoslavia he returned to Wels only in 1946, where Doppelbauer was organist and choir director at the Stadtpfarrkirche 1947 – 57, rebuilding David’s Bach Choir in 1951. After studying at the Salzburg Mozarteum (in order to receive a teaching qualification in music) and a trial year as music teacher Doppelbauer worked 1957 – 60 as lecturer for music theory at the Linz Bruckner Conservatoire and 1960 – 88 as a teacher of organ, music theory, composition and church music composition at the Mozarteum (since 1969 as associate and since 1972 as full professor). 1971 – 1984 he was assistant director there. Doppelbauer died in January 1989 in Salzburg.



Josef Friedrich Doppelbauer



Stylistic versatility

The versatility of his complete works as regards stylistic traits, motivations and target audiences can best be shown in his many organ compositions of varying format. This is hardly surprising in a musician well-known as an organ teacher and for his organ concerts, also as an improviser. But one should not forget that Doppelbauer wrote, apart from his organ and church music, also numerous chamber music works, writing especially for wind instruments and for some rather rare combinations (e. g. pieces for flute or oboe, viola, and cello).



Organ works

In his organ works, Doppelbauer traverses a wide terrain from the rhythmically taut Partita in c (1955) and its modal sound world and frequent parallel fourths to the partita Ornamente (1969) with its undogmatic, playful and individual approach to ideas from the surroundings of the so-called twelve-tone music. Later large-scale organ works, such as the varied and formally clear Fantasie I 'Hommage à Dietrich Buxtehude' (1974), move between these poles.

The Doppelbauer family on a trip to Vienna at Doblinger Barocksalon (with Angela Pachovsky)!



Perfect metamorphosis: Wine turns into music - music turns into wine!



French tradition

Doppelbauer was also interested in the French tradition. In his introductory notes he counts the Suite brève (1961) among his 'French' organ works, which becomes manifest e. g. in the resounding Toccata. This is remarkable in a time when German-speaking countries performed only few French organ compositions regularly (e. g. Franck's Choral in A minor and some of the 'old masters' newly edited already by Guilmant) and must be seen in context with the Toccata francese of Kropfreiter and Heiller's preoccupation with the works of Jehan Alain. Doppelbauer's Toccata und Fuge in e 'In memoriam Maurice Ravel' (1951) is an early example for his international interests. The Drei kleine Präludien und Fugen (1966) contain, as no. 2., a 'Hommage à César Franck.'



Meticulousness and passion

Doppelbauer composed for concert performances, for church services and for the use of instrumental pedagogy with equal meticulousness and passion. He wrote, very self-confidently, about composing short and technically easy pieces: 'It is an error to think that a lesser talent is necessary to master smaller forms. One only starts to master those when one masters the larger forms.' The „Zehn Etüden für Orgelpedal Solo“ (1959) are varied and striking miniatures. Apart from the collection „25 kleine Studien für Anfänger“ (1985) and the five volumes of „Aphorismen und Versetten zu Kirchenliedern“ (1978 - 83) we must mention here the twelve „Kleine Stücke“ (1965 - 67), which provide a good overview in a narrow space—ranging from very easy pieces like Pastorale, Choral or Intermezzo, all of which are suitable for beginners, to the initial Präludium at the collection's beginning, which is highly demanding in its pedal treatment, but very brief in its only 23 measures. It is here that the simultaneously artistic and pedagogic aspirations of a multi-faceted composer becomes apparent.

Matthias Wamser (Basel)
(Fotos J.F.Doppelbauer: (c) Familie Doppelbauer)